

DEGREES OF POWER ATTENDING THE GOSPEL NO. 648

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as you know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.”
1 Thessalonians 1:5.*

PAUL here claimed two things which are absolutely necessary to success in the Christian ministry. He could call the Gospel, “*our* gospel,” and this is a foremost essential in a sent servant of Jesus Christ. Paul, Silas, and Timothy, here speaking at once, declare the word which they had preached to be their own in a peculiar sense—every true minister must be able to do the same. We must ourselves have been saved before we preach salvation. “I believed, therefore have I spoken,” says the Psalmist. “We also believe, and therefore speak,” say the whole college of the apostles. Without faith, the religious teacher is a mere pretender unworthy of respect. The Christian minister must, however, not only believe the truth of what he asserts, but he must experientially enjoy it.

The farmer who labors must himself also first be a partaker of the fruit. Before Ezekiel delivered to the people the prophecies which were written in the roll, the voice came to him, “Son of man, eat this roll,” and he did not only take it into his mouth, where it was like honey for sweetness, but it descended even into his bowels, and mingled with his innermost self. We must ourselves feel the weight of that burden of the Lord which we proclaim to others, or we shall not be ministers of the apostolic sort, but rather shall be descendants of the hypocritical Pharisees who bound heavy burdens, grievous to be borne, upon other men’s shoulders, but were not willing to touch them with so much as one of their fingers.

The apostle Paul could with peculiar propriety, call the Gospel his own. On the road to Damascus he had singularly experienced its mighty power. And afterwards, in trials oft, in difficulties many, in experiences varied, in temptations furious, he had made each truth of Scripture his own by having tasted its sweetness, handled its strength, proved its comfort, and tried its power. Do not think of preaching, young man, until you have truth written on your very soul. As well think of steering the Great Eastern across the ocean without knowing the first principles of navigation. As well think of setting up as an ambassador without your country’s sanction, as to dare to intrude yourself into the Christian ministry unless the Gospel is first your *own*.

No amount of training at Oxford, or Cambridge, or anywhere else, no extent of classical or mathematical teaching can ever make you a minister of Jesus Christ, if you lack the first necessary, namely, a personal interest in salvation by Jesus Christ. What! Will you profess to be a physician, while the leprosy is on your own brow? Will you attempt to stand between the living and the dead when you are yourself devoid of spiritual life? The priests of old were touched with the blood upon their thumb, the toe, and the ear, to show that they were consecrated everywhere. And none among us must dare to exercise any office for God among His people till first of all we know the cleansing, quickening, refining, sanctifying power of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. It must be *our* Gospel before we may so much as think of aspiring to the high and holy office of the Gospel ministry.

But this alone is not sufficient. The Christian minister, if he would imitate Paul, must be very careful of *his manner of life among the people*. He must be able to say without blushing, “You know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.” Unselfishness must be our prominent attribute, all

must be done for our people's sake. And then, we must in our lives show the truthfulness of our unselfish professions. O God, how much of grace is wanted that Your servants may be clear of the blood of all men, and make full proof of their ministry. We are not appointed to stand as motionless way-posts to point the way with lifeless accuracy and unsympathizing coldness. This many have done, and while showing the road have never moved one inch in it themselves—such men shall have terrible judgment at the last.

We are appointed to be guides to the pilgrims over the hills of life, and we are bound to attend their footsteps, and tread the road ourselves. Clambering up every hill of difficulty and descending every valley of humiliation, we are to be crying to the pilgrim band, "Be ye followers of us even as we are followers of Christ Jesus." It is not for us to say, "Go!" but "Come!" We are not to bid you *do* without first doing ourselves. It is an ill time with the preacher when he is compelled to say, "Do as I say and not as I do," for evil practice will drown the best of preaching.

Oh! that holy living, intense earnestness, passionate longing for souls, vehement persistence in prayer, humility and sincerity, may so blend together in our walk and conversation, that having the Gospel to be our own, we may be fully fitted for the work of the Christian ministry, "for your sake"—that you who hear us may not find us unprofitable in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having said this much upon the ministry itself, we observe that our text deals mainly with the hearers, and therefore has a voice for you. We shall use the text for two purposes—first, by way of *discrimination*. And secondly, for *instruction*.

I. The text suggests, and very strongly too, a thoroughly heart-searching DISCRIMINATION, a mode of testing ourselves by which our election may be proved, or our unregeneracy discovered.

The Gospel comes to all who hear it. In our own land, especially among you who constantly attend places of worship, it comes to you all. If I understand Scripture aright, it is the same Gospel which comes to the unregenerate as to the regenerate, and though in some it be "a savor of death unto death," and in others, "a savor of life unto life," yet the distinction is not in the Gospel but in the way in which it is received or rejected.

Some of our brethren who are very anxious to carry out the decrees of God, instead of believing that God can carry them out Himself, always try to make distinctions in their preaching, giving one Gospel to one set of sinners, and another to a different class. They are very unlike the old sowers, who, when they went out to sow, sowed among thorns, and on stony places, and by the wayside. But these brothers, with profound wisdom, endeavor to find out which is the good ground, and they will insist upon it that not so much as a single handful of invitations may be cast anywhere but on the prepared soil.

They are much too wise to preach the Gospel in Ezekiel's fashion to the dry bones in the valley while they are yet dead. They withhold any Word of the Gospel till there is a little quivering of life among the bones, and then they commence operations. They do not think it to be their duty to go into the highways and hedges, and bid all, as many as they find, to come to the supper. Oh, no, they are too orthodox to obey the Master's will. They desire to understand first who are appointed to come to the supper, and then they will invite them. That is to say they will do what there is no necessity to do. They have not faith enough, or enough subjugation of will to the supreme commands of the great Master, to do that which only faith dares do, namely, tell the dry bones to live, bid the man with the withered hand stretch out his arm, and speak to him who is sick of the palsy, and tell him to take up his bed and walk.

It strikes me that refusing to set forth Jesus to all men of every character, and refraining from inviting them to come to Him is a great mistake. I do not find David suiting his counsels to the ability of men. He gives commands to ungodly men, "Be wise, therefore, O you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish from the way, while his wrath is kindled but a little." He did not withhold his exhortation because they were such rebels that they would not and could not kiss the king. No. He told them to do it, whether they could or not.

So with the prophets. They boldly say, "Wash you! Make you clean! Put away the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well." One of them absolutely cries, "Make

you a new heart and a new spirit,” (Eze 18:31). And yet, I doubt not, that he was perfectly agreed with that other prophet, who taught the powerlessness of man in those two memorable questions, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” These men did not think that they were to judge of what they were to preach by the degree of power in the hearers. But they judged by the power which dwells in their God to make the Word effectual.

As it was with prophets, so was it with apostles. For Peter cried to the crowd who gathered about the Beautiful Gate of the temple, “Repent ye, therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” They delivered *the* Gospel, the same Gospel to the dead as to the living, the same Gospel to the non-elect as to the elect. The point of distinction is not in the Gospel, but in its being applied by the Holy Spirit, or left to be rejected of man. The same Gospel, it strikes me in the text, came to all, and the point of distinction was farther on, namely, in the operation of that Gospel upon the heart.

1. It appears, then, in the first place, that to some the Gospel comes only in word. Even here there are gradations. To some it only comes in word in this fashion, that *they scarcely know what it is all about*. Some of you go to a place of worship because it is a right thing, and you sit down on the seat and sit out an hour-and-a-half or so of penance. When that is done you feel you have performed a very proper act, but you do not know what the talk was all about. It may be said of you that hearing, you do not hear, for your ears are dull and heavy. You know no more of the divine mind than the men who were with Saul on the road to Damascus, who heard a voice, but saw no man.

I believe a very large majority of church goers know no more of what the preaching is about than did Jonathan’s lad when he ran after the arrows. Their flight David well understood, “but the lad knew nothing of the matter.” Too many are merely the stolid, unthinking, slumbering worshippers of an unknown God. In others the Word comes in a little better sense, but still in word only. They have it, and *they understand it in theory*, and probably are much pleased with it, especially if it be delivered in a manner which suits their taste, or which commends itself to their understanding. They hear and they do not quite forget. They remember and are gratified with illustrations, doctrinal truths, and so on, but when you have said that, you have said all.

The Gospel remains in them as certain potent drugs remain in the chemist’s bottles—they are there but they produce no effect. The Gospel comes to them as an unloaded cannon rumbles into its shed, or as a barrel of gunpowder is rolled into the magazine—there is no force in it because the fire of God’s Spirit is absent. The preacher lashes the air and whips the water, woos the wind, and invites the cloud when he preaches to such as these. They hear, but hear in vain, insensible as steel.

To others it comes in a preferable manner, but still only in word. *They are really affected by it*. The tears stream down their cheeks. They scarcely know how to sit. They resolve, if they once get home, they will pray. They think of amending their lives—past follies and present dangers come before them, and they are somewhat alarmed. But the morning cloud is not more fleeting, and the early dew vanishes not sooner than these good things of theirs. They look at their natural face in the glass of the Word, but they go away and forget what manner of men they are—because the emotion felt is produced by the words, and not by the Spirit and life of the truth.

Why, brethren, men weep at a theater, and weep far more there than they do in many places of worship. Therefore, merely to weep under a sermon is no sign of having derived profit therefrom. Some of my brethren are very great hands at unearthing the dead, conducting you to the funeral urns of your parents, or reminding you of your departed little ones, and possibly they may be the means of introducing better feelings by this kind of working upon your emotions, but I am not sure of it—I am afraid that much of the holy water which is spilt from human eyes in our places of worship is not much more valuable than the holy water at the doors of the Catholic chapels. It is mere eye water after all, and not heart sorrow.

Mere excitement produced by oratory is the world’s weapon in attaining its end. We want something more than that for spiritual purposes—if we could “speak with the tongues of men and of angels,” and stir you up to as great an enthusiasm as ever Demosthenes wrought in the Greeks of old, all that would

avail nothing if it were only the effect of the preacher's impassioned language, and telling manner—the Gospel would have come to you “in word only,” and that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and nothing more.

At this point I may very solemnly ask whether it is not true of some who compose the present congregation that you know the truth only *in word*? There is a certain class of persons, and some of them are present this morning, who are professional sermon hearers. You go one Sunday to hear Mr. A., and then another Sunday to hear Mr. B., and you carry with you our sacchraometers—instruments for measuring the quantity of sweetness in each sermon—and you make note of the style and matter of the preacher. You estimate what blunders he makes, and how he could be improved, and you compare or contrast him with somebody else, as if you were tea tasters tasting Souchong and Bohea, or cheese mongers trying Cheddar and American.

Some individuals of this order are little better than spiritual vagabonds, without settled habitation or occupation, who go about from place to place, listening to this and to that, and getting no good whatever. While as to doing good, the thought never enters their brain. You cannot expect that the Gospel will come to you in anything else but as a killing letter, for you go to hear it as merely words. You do not look for fruit—if you see leaves, you are quite satisfied. You do not desire a blessing, if you did, you would receive it.

It is at once one of the most wicked, and one of the most foolish habits to waste our time in constantly criticizing God's Word and God's ministers. Well said George Herbert, “Judge not the preacher, he is your judge.” What have you to do to say of God's ambassador, that his words were not well mouthed? If God speaks by him, God knows who is best to speak for Him. And if his Master sent the man, beware lest you ill-treat him, or you may suffer like them of old who ill-treated the ambassadors of David, and drove him to proclaim war against them.

2. According to the text, *there are others to whom the Word comes with three accompaniments*. The apostle speaks of “power,” and “the Holy Ghost,” and “much assurance.” I do not think that the Word of God comes to many people with all these three things. It comes to a very numerous class with “power,” to a smaller number with “power and the Holy Ghost,” and to an inner circle of select ones “in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.”

If I have the meaning of this passage, and I am not so certain about it as to dogmatize, it strikes me that there are three degrees of effect produced by the Gospel. At any rate, we shall not be wrong in saying that there is sometimes an effect produced by the Gospel which may be called “*power*,” but which, nevertheless, is not the power which saves. To many of you, my dear hearers, the word of our Gospel has come with power upon your *understandings*. You have heard it, weighed it, judged it, and received it as being true, and of divine authority.

Your understanding has assented to the various propositions which we have proclaimed as doctrines of Christ. You feel that you could not well do otherwise. These truths agree so well, and are so adapted at once to the ruin of your nature and to its best aspirations, that you do not kick as some do against it. You have been convinced of the authenticity and authority of the Gospel by the Gospel. Perhaps you have never read “Paley's Evidences,” and never studied “Butler's Analogy,” but the Gospel itself has come to you with sufficient power to be its own witness to you, and your understanding joyfully acknowledges that this is the Word of God, and you receive it as such.

It has done more than that, it has come with power to the *conscience* of some of you. It has convinced you of sin. You feel now that self-righteousness on your part is folly, and though you may indulge in self-righteousness, it is with your eyes open. You do not sin now so cheaply as you once did, for you know a little of the sinfulness of sin. Moreover, you have had some alarms with regard to the ultimate end of sin. The Gospel has made you know that the wages of sin will be death. You feel that you cannot dwell with everlasting burnings. Your heart is ill at ease when you think upon the wrath to come. Like Felix you tremble when you are reasoned with concerning “righteousness and judgment to

come.” And though you have put it off as yet, and have said, “Go your way till I have a more convenient season,” yet it has come to you so far with a degree of power.

More than this, it has had an effect upon your *feelings* as well as upon your conscience. Your desires have been awakened. You have sometimes said, “Oh that I were saved.” You have advanced as far at any rate as Balaam when he said, “Let me die the death of the righteous.” Your feelings of hope are excited—you hope that you may yet lay hold of eternal life, and your fears are not altogether dead. You tremble when under the Word of God. Natural emotions, which look like spiritual ones, have been produced in you by the beaming of the Word, though as yet the Gospel has not come with the Holy Ghost.

Beyond all this, the Gospel has come with power to some of you *on your lives*. I can look with anxious pleasure upon some of you, because I know the Gospel has done you much good, though it has not saved you, though alas! there are others to whom it has only been for a time as a bit and bridle, but they have afterwards turned aside from it. There are those here, who, like the dog, have gone back to their vomit, and like the sow that was washed, to their wallowing in the mire. We had hope for you once, but we must almost cease to hope.

Certain persons rush into drunkenness after seasons of abstinence, having known the evil of the sin, and having professed to hate it. The passion has been too strong for them, and they have fallen again into that deep ditch in which so many of the abhorred of the Lord lie and rot. Oh, may God, in His infinite mercy, bring the Gospel with something more than this common power to your souls! May it come with “the Holy Ghost” as well as with power.

You see, we have come up by gradations to some considerable height already, but we now come to a far nobler elevation and speak of saving grace. To many in this house, as at Thessalonica, the Word has come “*in the Holy Ghost*.” Brethren, I cannot describe to you how it is that the Holy Ghost operates by the Word. The work of the Spirit is figured forth by some such mysterious thing as a birth, or as the blowing of the wind. It is a great secret, and therefore not to be expounded, but many of you know it experientially.

The Holy Ghost first of all came to you as the *great quickener*. How He made you live you do not know, but this you know, that what you had not once you now have, that there burns within you a vital spark of heavenly flame far different from that ordinary spark of life which had been there heretofore. You have now different feelings, different joys, different sorrows from any you were conscious of before, because while you were listening to the letter which kills, the Spirit of God came with it, and the quickening Spirit made you live with a new, higher, and more blessed life. You now have within you Jesus Christ, who is life and immortality. You have heaven begun within your heart. You have passed from death unto life, and shall never come into condemnation. To you the Word of God then has come with the Holy Ghost in a quickening sense.

Then it entered with an *illuminating* power. It enlightened you as to your sins. What blackness you discovered in your sins when the Holy Spirit once cast a light upon them. Brethren, you had no idea that you were such sinners as you turned out to be. The Holy Ghost startled and astonished you with revelations of that great and fathomless depth of depravity which you found to be surging within your souls. You were alarmed, humbled, cast into the dust. You began, perhaps, to despair, but then the same illumination of the Spirit came in to comfort you, for He then showed you Christ Jesus, the unbounded power of His blood to take away your unbounded sins, His willingness to receive you just as you were, His suitability to your case and to your circumstances. And as soon as you saw Jesus in the light of the Holy Ghost, you looked unto Him and were lightened, and henceforth your face has never been ashamed.

So the Spirit of God came to you as light, to dispel your darkness, and give you joy and peace. Since that time you have experienced the Holy Spirit as *comforting* you. Amidst darkest shades He has risen as the sunlight upon your souls. Your burdens have been removed by Him, the blessed Paraclete! He has brought Christ and the things of Christ to your remembrance. He has opened up to you precious

promises. He has cracked the shell, and given you to partake of the kernel of the privilege of the covenant of grace. He has broken the bone, and satisfied you with marrow and fatness out of the deep things of God. His dove-like wings, whenever they brood over you, bring order out of confusion, and yield kindly comfort in the midst of sorest adversity.

You have also felt the Holy Spirit in His *inflaming* energies. He has rested on you when you have heard the Word, as the Spirit of burning—your sin has been consumed by the holy revenge which you felt against it. You have been led to great heights of love to Christ, till you could sing,

*“Had I ten thousand thousand tongues,
Not one should be silent.
Had I ten thousand thousand hearts,
I’d give them all to Thee.”*

When the Holy Ghost has blessed the Word, your heart has been like the altar of incense with the flame always burning, and a sweet perfume going up, acceptable to the Most High.

Beloved, you have also felt the Holy Ghost with the Word as a spirit of *rejoicing*. Oh! the bliss we have sometimes tasted! I am very frequently heavy in spirit, but oh! the raptures which my heart has known when the Holy Ghost has shown me my eternal election of God, my standing in Christ Jesus, my completeness and acceptance in the Beloved, my security through the faithfulness of the eternal God. What delights come streaming into the soul when you read of everlasting love, of faithfulness never wavering, of affection never changing, of a purpose standing fast as pillars of brass and firm as the eternal hills.

And oh, beloved, what extravagance I was about to say, of joy do we sometimes feel in anticipation of the glory to be revealed. Looking from Nebo’s brow we see the landscape down below, but better than Moses could do, we already drink of the rivers which flow with milk and honey, and pluck ripe fruits from celestial trees. While in communion with Christ Jesus we get the best antepast of the glory that remains. Now this it is to receive the Word, “in the Holy Ghost.” Beloved, I hope we know what this means, and you who do not know it, may a prayer go up from every living soul here, “Lord, let the Holy Spirit go with the preaching of Jesus Christ, and let it be made effectual unto salvation.”

Beloved, the highest point in the text is, “*much assurance*.” If I understand the passage, it means this—first, that they were fully persuaded of its truthfulness, and had no staggering or blinding doubts about it. And secondly, that they had the fullest possible conviction of their interest in the truth delivered to them. They were saved, but better still! they knew that they were so. They were clean, but better still! they rejoiced in their purity. They were in Christ, but what is more joyous still, they knew that they were in Christ.

They had no doubts, as some of you have, no dark suspicions. The Word had come with such blessed demonstration that it had swept every Canaanitish doubt clean out of their hearts. According to Poole, the Greek word used here has in it the idea of a ship at full sail, undisturbed by the waves which ripple in its way. A ship, when the wind is thoroughly favorable, and its full sails are bearing it directly into harbor, is not held back by the surging billows. True, the vessel may rock, but it neither turns to the right hand, nor to the left. Let the billows be as they may, the wind is sufficiently powerful to overcome their contrary motion, and the vessel goes right straight ahead.

Some Christians get the Gospel in that way. They have not a shadow of a doubt about its being true. They have not even the beginning of a doubt about their interest in it, and therefore they have nothing to do, but with God’s strong hand upon the tiller, and the heavenly wind blowing right into the sail, to go right straight on, doing the will of God, glorifying His name. May the Word come to you, dear friends, as it does to so very few! May it come in “full assurance,” as well as in “power,” and in “the Holy Ghost!”

3. I shall leave this first head of the text, when I observe that *this is the way in which God's elect are known*. The apostle says, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." Why? Knowing it not by making a guess about it. Not by questioning you whether you are awakened sinners, whether you are sensible or insensible sinners. Not by waiting to preach the Gospel to you when you are prepared to receive the Gospel, but we preached the Gospel to you as you were, and we found out who were the elect by this, that the elect of God received the Gospel as it came, "in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." This is the test of election—the Holy Ghost blessing the Word.

And dear friends, if the Holy Ghost has blessed it to you, you need not want to turn over the mysterious pages of the divine decrees, for your name is there. You have not *my* word for it, but *God's* word for it. He would not have brought you to feel the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit, if He had not from before all worlds ordained you unto eternal life.

But mark you and this observe comes from the ensuing context, *you must give good proof that it is so*, or we cannot say, and even the apostle could not have said, "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." We cannot tell whether the Word has come to you in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, unless there are the corresponding results.

Listen to these words, "And you became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that you were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."

So you see an imitation of apostolic example, a faith which becomes so known as to sound abroad, a joy which affliction itself cannot damp, and a perseverance which is not to be turned aside by difficulties, a conversion which gives up the dearest idols, and binds us to Christ, and makes us watch and wait for Him—all these are necessary as proofs of the Holy Ghost having been with the Word.

O beloved, I would have you, the members of this congregation, not only converted, but so converted that there should be no doubt about it. I would love to have you not only Christians, but such fruit-bearing Christians, that it will be to a demonstration certain that you have received the Word "in much assurance." Then shall it be equally clear that you are the elect of God. May the Lord grant that the Word here may ever be like a powerful magnet thrust into a heap of steel filings and of ashes, which shall attract all the filings and bring them out. For that is what the Gospel is to do—it is to discern between the precious and the vile. It is to be God's winnowing fan to separate His elect from those who are left in their ruin. And it only can do this by the way in which it is received, proving the election of those who receive it, "in the Holy Ghost." Thus much by way of discrimination.

II. Have patience for a few minutes only while we now use the text by way of PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION.

It is clear from the text, by way of practical instruction, that it is not enough to preach the Gospel. Something more is wanted for the conversion of souls than even that. I have stirred you up very often to assist me, dear brethren, in training those of our young men who have been called to preach the Gospel, that they may be more efficient in their ministry, and you have kindly helped me. But we must ever bear in mind that though God should privilege us to send out hundreds of His ministering servants, yet there will not be a solitary case of conversion worked by them alone. We wish to do our best to erect fresh places of worship for this ever-increasing city, and it is a happy day to me whenever I see the top stone brought out of a new house of prayer.

But not one single soul shall ever be made to rejoice in Christ Jesus by the mere fact of a place of worship being erected, or of worship being celebrated therein. We *must* have the energy of the Holy Ghost. There is the one all-important matter. What is there practical about this? Why then *it becomes*

more and more imperatively necessary that we should be much in prayer to God that the Holy Ghost would come.

We have the spirit of prayerfulness among us as a church. Let me earnestly entreat you never to lose it. There are certain of my brethren and sisters here who are never absent from our great gathering on Monday evening, and whose prayers have brought down many blessings. But it is the part of fidelity for me to say that there are some of you who might be here if you would, but seldom favor us with your presence. Or let me say, who seldom do yourselves the happiness of waiting upon God in prayer meetings. You are not the best of our members. You will never be the best of them if you stay away without having a justifiable excuse.

I do not say this to those who I know must be absent, and I do not say it to bring women out who ought to be seeing to their husbands, or to bring men out who ought to be attending to their shops. But I say it to some who might as well be here as not, and would bring no detriment to themselves whatever by being here. And I must qualify what I say with this, that I have less to complain of in this respect than any man in Christendom, for there is no place that I ever knew or heard of where the prayer meeting bears so good and fair a proportion to the Sunday gathering as it does here.

But still, brethren, we want you all to pray. I would I could see you all! Oh! it were a happy day if we could see this place full on Monday evening. I do not know why it should not be. It strikes me that if your hearts were once to get thoroughly warmed, we would fill this house for prayer. And what a blessing we might expect to receive! Why, we have had such a blessing already that we have not room enough to receive it now, but still, as the cup begins to run over, let it run over and over. There are many churches in this neighborhood that can catch the spillover, and may they be profited thereby.

Let us increase our praying as we increase our doing. I like that of Martin Luther, when he says, “I have so much business to do today, that I shall not be able to get through it with less than three hours’ prayer.” Now most people would say, “I have so much business to do today, that I must only have three minutes’ prayer—I cannot afford the time.” But Luther thought that the more he had to do the more he must pray, or else he could not get through it. That is a blessed kind of logic—may we understand it! “Praying and provender hinder no man’s journey.” If you have to stop and pray, it is no more an hindrance than when the rider has to stop at the farrier’s to have his horse’s shoe fastened, for if he went on without attending to that it may be that ere long he would come to a stop of a far more serious kind.

Let us learn from the text *our own indebtedness to distinguishing and sovereign grace*. You observe, beloved, that the Gospel does not come with the power of the Holy Ghost to everybody. If, then, it has come to us, what shall we do but bless and praise the distinguishing grace which made it come to us. You observe that the distinction was not in the persons themselves, it was in the way in which the Gospel came. The distinction was not even in the Gospel, but in the attendant Spirit making it effectual.

If you have heard the Word with power, it was not, dear brethren, because you were more ready, because you were less inclined to sin, or more friendly towards God. You were an alien, a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy—you were “dead in trespasses and sins,” even as others were and are. There was in you, whatever Papists may say, no grace of congruity to meet with the grace of Christ. They say that there is something in man congruous to the grace of God, so that when saving grace comes to those who have the grace of congruity, they are saved.

In me I know everything was incongruous, everything contrary to God. There was darkness, and light came. There was death, and life entered. There was hatred, and love drove it out. There was the dominion of Satan, and Christ overcame the traitor.

*“Then give all the glory to His holy name,
To Him all the glory belongs.
Be yours the high joy still to sound forth His name,
And praise Him in each of your songs.”*

A third practical lesson we will but hint at, namely, we see that *there are degrees of attainment* even among those who have received the Word with the Holy Ghost. *Let us seek for the very highest degree.* You are not generally satisfied with the same qualities of life, you desire to possess its comforts and luxuries. I will commend you if you carry this into spiritual things. Do not be content merely to be saved, merely to be spiritually alive—ask to be valiant for truth. I should feel it a great honor, I hope, to be the most common soldier, if called upon to defend my country, but I must confess I should not like to be in the ranks always. I should like, at least, to be made a corporal very soon, and a sergeant as soon as possible. And I should grumble wonderfully much if I could not rise to rank among the commissioned officers. I should like to be found doing my very best, and I would reach to the most prominent position if I might serve therein my country better than in the ranks.

So I think it should be with the Christian. He is not to seek for honor among men, but if he can by getting more grace be more serviceable to his God, and bring more honor to His name, why let him press forward. Ah, my dear brethren, what business have you to be sitting still and saying, “It is enough.” The “rest-and-be-thankful” policy is not much approved of in politics—and in religion it will never answer. On! Forward! Upward! As the eagle takes for its motto, “Superior,” and still mounts higher, and higher, and higher, till the young wing which first trembled at the height has grown into the strong pinion which makes him companion of the sun and playmate with the lightning, so let the Christian do. If he has learned to “run and not be weary,” let him seek to “mount up as on the wings of eagles.” Onward, fellow soldier! Be you yet more valiant till your name is written among the first three.

To close, does not this text, as a last practical lesson, show us indirectly *how a privilege may become a curse*? The Word of God has come to you all. I suppose there is not one here who has not heard the story of the love of God in Christ Jesus. You have been told many times that though man has fallen and offended God, yet the Lord has set forth His suffering Son, Christ Jesus, to be a propitiation for sin, and that through faith in His name, “Whosoever believes on him shall never perish.”

You have been told that God waits to be gracious, and that whosoever looks to Christ shall live, whosoever calls upon the Lord shall be saved. Now, having heard this, whatever some may tell you, we feel bound as in the sight of God, to warn you that if this comes “in word only” to you, it will increase your condemnation. Certain preachers think that this Word is not “a savor of death unto death” to any, but it is, it is. Whatever their theories, whatever hyper-calvinistic theology may say, it is God’s word that it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment, than it shall be for cities like Capernaum and Bethsaida, which heard the Word, and yet repented not.

You are not machines. You are not creatures merely to be acted upon, you are to act as well as to be moved. And every good word that reaches your ear is written down as a debt against you. There is no declaration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ which, if refused, does not leave you more disobedient than you were. Remember how the apostle states it, “Unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.”

Now they could not have been disobedient if it was not their duty to obey. No man is disobedient where there is no law. It is, therefore, the duty of every sinner hearing the Gospel to believe it, and if he does not, this same stone shall fall upon him and shall grind him to powder. Kiss the Son, therefore, lest He, lest *He* be angry, and you perish from the way while His wrath is kindled but a little. The same Savior who blesses will be angry. He who loves His people, grows angry with those who reject Him. And when His wrath is kindled but a little, woe unto the object of it!

Blessed are all they that trust in Him, and may we be found among that blessed number to the praise and glory of *His* grace, wherein He makes us to differ according to the appointment of His own divine will. May God bless this assembly for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.